§6. *Stories*

When we were children my father used to tell us stories in the evening. Whenever we showed signs of restlessness he stopped. Here are some of the stories that I remember. 538● 159* 519

The Story of Coyote and the Ghost

Coyote was wandering about alone. He was wandering about aimlessly looking for food; he was scenting around everywhere for food, for he was very hungry. As he was walking from place to place he suddenly became aware of the scent of human flesh. "Ah! Ah! If there are any human beings in the neighborhood surely they have thrown away bits of food and I shall be able to get some." So he started in the direction of the scent and soon he got to an old abandoned village and picked up some moccasins, but he could find nothing that would satisfy his hunger. He wandered to the end of the village thinking, "Perhaps here at the end of the village I may find some graves and possibly the bodies there will still have some flesh on them." But not even graves could he find. 539

In the distance, however, he saw a rack and when he ran toward it eager to see what it was, he saw a corpse lying on top. A man had died and his body had been placed on a burial scaffold. "Oh my! Oh my!" he exclaimed, "If this body were only on the ground then indeed

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3. MYTHOLOGY

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Running through the whole of Winnebago mythology-literature, is the distinction between two types of narrative, the worak and the waikā. The first, literally translated, means *what-is-recounted*, and the second *what-is-sacred*. The worak belongs to the realm of what is regarded as true and humanly possible and attainable, as pertaining to the present workaday world as we know it. The hero must be a human being and the plot must end tragically. The waikā, on the other hand, belongs to the past that is irretrievably gone, to the realm of things no longer possible or attainable by man. It pertains to the world of spirits and deities, to the world of wish fulfillment. The hero must be a divine personage and immortal and the end can never be tragic. A waikā can become a worak by the simple device of bringing the plot into relationship with the contemporary human scene. The divine being has then become, for the time being, a human one. But there is no tragic *dénouement*. A worak, however, can never become a waikā.

As an example of the change from waikā to worak, let me take the cycle concerning the favorite heroes of the Winnebago, the Twins. Their adventures constitute real happenings and not, what one might have supposed far-off divine events, for one simple reason, namely, their resting-place is on earth and they, and this resting-place, have actually been seen by the fathers of present-day Indians.

It seems to have been one of the persistent endeavors of those Winnebago who reflected on such matters, to emphasize not only the distinctions mentioned above but, likewise, for them to link together the various adventures of their more important heroes into reasonably well-integrated epics, each one possessing its own developmental scheme. There are four such major cycles, that of Trickster, that of Hare, that of the battles of the good deities against the evil ones, and that of the Twins.

The theme of the Trickster epic is the unconscious, yet purposive, evolution of the hero from a grotesque, chaotic figure knowing neither good nor evil, to one with the lineaments of man. He symbolizes the gradual evolution from irresponsibility to responsibility.

Where Trickster stops Hare begins. He is a combination of a trickster and a culture-hero. His benefactions, for instance, are all accidental. But from the start, he possesses the lineaments of a human being and his orientation is toward man. He is no longer the supreme egoist that Trickster was. At the end of his adventures the earth has been transformed into a place where human beings can live and operate.

It is the function of the heroes of the third cycle to prevent this order which Hare has established from being again disrupted and returning to chaos. The function of the Twins is to continue the struggles of the heroes of the third cycle and to attempt to stabilize this order for all time.

Now although the theme of all these epics is the struggle against chaos and the introduction of order, each one of the great heroes of the last three epics, attempts to disrupt the order he has himself established. Hare brings death into the universe, Storms-as-he-walks, one of the heroes of the third cycle, kills wantonly and unnecessarily and the Twins kill one of the deities who hold our earth in place. In the case of the Twins it is important to stress the fact that, as we shall see, their attack on the world order is the result of exuberance of energy which is, in itself, constructive.

This same theme of the necessity for intelligent order and the establishment of stability runs, like a guiding thread, through the Origin Myth given on pages 17 ff. and pages 252 ff. There, the first problem of Earthmaker after he has, so to say, given himself a fixed orientation in the universe at large and brought about order within himself, is to stop the earth he has created from continuing its ceaseless motion. This he achieves by anchoring it at the four cardinal points and then weighing it down by means of vegetation and mountains. The anchorage, significantly enough, is brought about by pinning the island-earth down by four waterspirits and four snakes. Now snakes are the specifically sacred animals of the Winnebago, the intermediaries between the deities and man. Waterspirits, on the other hand, are, essentially, the most productively evil and dangerous of all the deities for man, fascinating him, confusing him, and placing in his hands the means for his own destruction and the destruction

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of his fellowmen. By giving to the waterspirits the positive and constructive function of helping to stop the earth from spinning around and then holding it in place, part of their primary and ancient danger has thus been neutralized. Yet it can, at best—in fact, it must—only be neutralized. To destroy it completely would be equivalent to saying that man has ceased to err, overcome all temptation and become one of the deities. Such a condition, the Winnebago insist, neither the deities nor man desire.

According to the esoteric view, the ambivalent but fundamentally evil and disruptive nature of the blessings of the waterspirit have never ceased. It is one of the subtle and symbolic features of the final adventure of the Twins, namely, the destruction of one of the waterspirits, the anchorers of the earth, that they are, after all, only doing in a human fashion what Earthmaker himself found it necessary to do, prevent the waterspirits from harming man. They kill the waterspirit and feed on its body. They do not understand that disruption and disintegration represent one half of the process of living and can, at best, be neutralized and delayed, never eliminated and destroyed. It is the symbol for motion and change without which life not only ceases to exist but is indeed inconceivable. Earthmaker, of course, recognizes this and he must, therefore, put a stop to the activities of the Twins and he punishes them. Their punishment is a symbol for the error they have committed. They became fixed, motionless and permanent, both of them traits that, according to Winnebago beliefs, are forms of death. In the puberty vision-quest one of the signs that foreshadows death is to dream of rocks or stones.

I cannot think of a closer parallel to what has here happened to the waterspirits than that of the transformation, in the Oresteia of Aeschylus, of the Furies into beneficent creatures.

But to continue with the Origin Myth. Having created order within himself and established it for the stage on which man is to play, Earthmaker proceeds to create the first beings who are to people the universe, the spirits and deities. To each one he assigns a fixed and specific amount of power, to some more, to some less. In a nature religion like that of the Winnebago, this is, of course, only another way of giving the objects and forces of nature their

various attributes. A definite gradation of power is thus established with no one spirit possessing powers even measurably comparable to those which Earthmaker has reserved for himself.

This principle of gradation and subordination is part of the order that Earthmaker is represented as introducing into the universe so that it can advantageously function. The instant it is changed there is danger and the threat of disruption. This is the theme of the first part of the Twin cycle, for instance. The plot is clear. The hero, one of the eight great Winnebago deities, Morning Star, has been decapitated by his enemy, a waterspirit. The body of the hero still remains alive and is being taken care of by his sister. The waterspirit, by keeping the head of Morning Star, has added the latter's power to his own. So formidable is this combination of powers that none of the deities, individually or in combination, are a match for him now. In fact only Earthmaker is his equal. Here is a threat of the first magnitude to the order ordained by Earthmaker and it must be met lest destruction overtake the world. Manifestly, the only manner of coping with the situation is to find some hero who can conquer the waterspirit, deprive him of the head of Morning Star and restore it to its owner.

But where is such a hero to be found? Nowhere. Consequently he must be newly created. This can be accomplished either by Earthmaker creating him directly as he has already done others or by his being born of some spirit. The days of special creation, however, are over. He must, therefore, be born as all creatures are now born, divine or human. But how can it be arranged that the hero, so born, has the requisite powers to achieve victory? The answer must be by such a hero being endowed for the task with enough power by all the deities, including Earthmaker.

This is accordingly done and these powers which will make its possessor greater than all the deities in existence and the equal of Earthmaker are delivered to the Sun with instructions that he impregnate the sister of Morning Star. The children born of Sun and the sister of Morning Star, who is herself a deity, are the Twins. They vanquish the waterspirit and restore the head of their uncle to his body. Thus the original order ordained by Earthmaker has been

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reestablished. Earthmaker, however, faced with the necessity of reestablishing it, has laid the seeds for further disruption by contravening the basic principle of limited and graded powers. The danger entering in such an act makes itself felt immediately; for the Twins, after completing their proper mission of destroying whatever evil spirits still exist on earth, or at least neutralizing them, destroy, as we have seen, one of the foundations of the earth. They do so in conformity with the Winnebago realistic conception that the possession of power necessitates its exercise.

Earthmaker, however, has no powers, within himself, to stop them. If, in the end, he does succeed, it is by a device which, on first blush, must strike us as puerile yet which is actually quite profound. He frightens them. The unafraid are made to be afraid, something that comes from within themselves. They try to hide and seek shelter, without success because, of course, they cannot hide from themselves. Finally, in desperation, they flee for protection to Earthmaker. This is, of course, what he is seeking. The moment they are in his possession and have come as suppliants, he has gained contact with them and thereby attained ascendancy over them. He can then speak to them and point out the nature of their transgression as well as its dangers. They recognize both and acquiesce cheerfully in the punishment meted out. Thus, for the time being, order and responsibility have again been reestablished in their rights.

We have so far dealt with the problem of order and disorder in its general, cosmological aspects. We must now take it up in its relation to man.

It is only after the spirits and deities have been created and endowed with the powers they are to have that Earthmaker, according to the Origin Myth, creates man. As the Winnebago say this happened at the end of Earthmaker's thoughts. Man is thus in the position of the orphan of Winnebago story: he possesses nothing. Earthmaker has nothing to give him. Accordingly, man is both weak and defenseless.

This depiction of man as completely unprovided for the vicissitudes of life, has a number of important implications. First of all, it is a well-recognized literary device, indeed almost a *cliché*, to have

the last and least qualified of the personages in a myth or tale, become the true hero. Secondly, it is the cardinal ethical principle of the Winnebago that the lowly shall be raised to high estate. That is the reward for humility. Thirdly, a hero or a virtuous man must show a development, must bring about order within himself. We have seen that hold true for Trickster, for Hare and for Earthmaker himself.

In both versions of the Origin Myth, man is projected naked into an atmosphere over which he has no control whatsoever and where he is immediately attacked by evil spirits. This is in flat contradiction with the accounts of his original state in the exoteric myths. There he is almost immediately placed in possession of tobacco, the intermediary between man and the deities, as well as of flint, corn, etc.

If this is not mentioned in the Origin Myth that is because he is not to save himself or receive the wherewithal of life through the accidental benefactions of culture-heroes. On the contrary, he is to be in dire straits and saved. Earthmaker is represented as withholding tobacco from the spirits in order to present it to man and as endowing these same spirits with an overpowering craving for it. In short, it is to be the mechanism for an exchange between man and the deities. He will give them tobacco; they will give him powers to meet life and overcome obstacles. Yet the deities cannot, by themselves, save him. They are at strife with one another. This can only be done by Earthmaker. For this purpose he dispatches the great primordial culture-heroes, Trickster, Bladder, Turtle and Hare to the earth.

This is a completely new role for all three. Naturally they do not succeed. They cannot be saviours. Their antecedents are against them. Trickster is the supreme egoist, the chaotic buffoon hero, a kind of Priapus, without any sense of responsibility and without purpose as far as man is concerned. His most positive contribution is to point out the stupidity, the cupidity, the vanities and foibles of creatures. He cannot help anyone. With man he has never had any connection. Turtle is not much better. He is the embodiment of cowardice, braggadocio and unabashed sensualism. The best he can do is to participate in warfare and, then, never as a hero.

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105 538 773 If Hare succeeds, it is because all his antecedents fit him better for the task. In the original Hare cycle he is born of a human woman and brought up by grandmother Earth herself. Although, at the beginning, his benefactions to mankind are all accidental, they do, at the end, give man the complete quota of his needs. It was comparatively easy to transform him into a hero without blemish. His one fault is demanding too much for man.

It is at this point that the problem of order versus disorder again presents itself. Not content with destroying evil on earth Hare demands immortality for his uncles and his nieces. Thus, like the Twins, he disrupts the world order through excess of constructive powers. But the difference between the Twins and Hare is that the former do it out of a kind of power drive while Hare does it in the supposed interests of man.

According to the story Hare, of course, fails. So obstinately, however, does he refuse to accept the inevitable that Earthmaker consents to an apparent revision of the world order in one respect. He will grant man the possibility of transcending death, by means of successive reincarnations, on condition that he agrees to face life and its vicissitudes in accordance with a specific ethical code. This is, of course, the theme of the Medicine Rite. For man, then, an exception to the law of birth, growth and death is permitted to this extent—he can repeat the cycle of birth, growth and decay an indefinite number of times.

But it is naturally in religion and ritualism that we must expect to find the best illustrations of the basic principles we have so far discussed in connection with social organization and mythology and to these we shall now turn.

4. RELIGION

105 121 771 Because of the highly complex character of Winnebago religion I shall confine myself primarily to an analysis of the nature of the powers the spirits and deities are supposed to possess, the relationship postulated between them and man, and the requests man makes

105 771 776 The priest-thinker thus contended that man could be made to approximate to the deities by simply manipulating powers and attributes which some individuals, at least, already possessed. Was it, however, wise to leave it to the individual himself to attempt this approximation? There had always been individuals in the community who essayed it but the net results of their attempts had spelled misfortune for them and misfortune for the community. They were generally the practitioners of evil magic, the poisoners. The Medicine Rite is replete with stories about them. Apparently, then, this was not a matter to be left to the discretion of an individual or for that matter to human beings at all. Man was to be educated to divinity by the deities themselves. For this purpose both were to be transformed into more disciplined, more responsible, more ethical and more profoundly realistic beings. Just as in the attainment of the goods of life, so now in the attainment of the benefits flowing from divinity, he was to face the problem bravely and realistically and endure stoically and understandingly the hardships and sufferings involved. In short, divinity had to be achieved. It could not be thrust upon one. The deities, likewise, had to be educated and be made to realize that nothing was due them as such and that they could expect no sustenance from man unless their own way of life was organized and ethically ordered and unless their blessings were given in good faith and in gratitude.

105 771 776 53% The poet-philosophers composed many a worak to bring out just these points. To give an example. A child is fasting and refuses one gift after another from the deities. Perturbed, they turn to the father and ask him to discover what the boy wants that has not already been granted him. In answer to his father's question, the boy says he does not wish to die. Neither the entreaties of the father or the spirits avail. And so the boy must die although he is rewarded by being transformed into a pine tree.

Now this is actually a completely transformed version of a well-known story, *The Child Who Fasted Too Long*. In the original version he dies because he has overreached himself. In such stories the spirits are neutral, that is, where they are not actually inciting

the young faster to overreach and destroy himself. Thus we see along what lines the reinterpretations of the priest-thinker were made. 105 771

This was the theory that the priest-thinker tried to impress upon his fellowmen in order to introduce a greater sense of confidence and security in the relationship between man and the deities. Because of the very high demands it made upon the worshipper, it remained largely a philosophical-ethical ideal and the fairly sharp line of demarcation between human beings and the spirits continued in force as the popular theory. Some there were who even insisted that it was, not only the courageous, but the morally justifiable thing to do, to coerce the deities into acquiescing in man's demands. That was the proper way to meet divinity, to challenge the gods, accept what they granted and, then, to attempt to fulfill the conditions imposed even if they meant death. Few individuals in the community, for instance, had greater prestige than the few who had secured a blessing from the much dreaded deity, *Disease-giver*. He had two faces, one dealing life and the other death. No suppliant knew which side would be turned toward him when he made his offerings, at noon, in the full blaze of day, contrary to what held for all the other deities, namely, that they must be approached at night. 776 [538] [554] [782]

This, of course, is the warrior's creed and, in a civilization like that of the Winnebago where the highest ambition as a man was to achieve distinction on the warpath, it naturally was very important. Yet to this, the chief of the tribe might well retort: such courage and such risks have their moral justification only when one is fighting the enemy or avenging the death of a kinsman. They are inapplicable when approaching a god. The taking of great risks concerns not only oneself but the whole community and must be subject to the sanctions of the community. A person must be carefully and properly educated before he dare take them. To exhibit fearlessness and heroic courage is, in itself, no virtue. Indeed, in the wrong place or on the wrong occasion, they can and do lead to death and destruction. 105 771 577

And so, in the realm of religion as in that of social organization and mythology, the problem to be faced is depicted as being the same. How are we to resolve the differences between the 'earth' interpre- 105 771